

Focus Group Guide for EO Command Assessments

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**Prepared
by**
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Command Focus Groups Interviews for Command Assessment

**Prepared for
EOA Symposium**

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Introduction

- ◆ Using focus groups is a powerful data-collection tool that can sharpen the information gathered by commanders, Equal Opportunity Advisors and others.
- ◆ Focus groups tap invaluable data on a wide variety of equal opportunity concerns from organizational members including senior leadership, officers, enlisted and civilians.
- ◆ This guidebook provides a practical guide for planning, conducting and evaluating data engendered by focus groups.

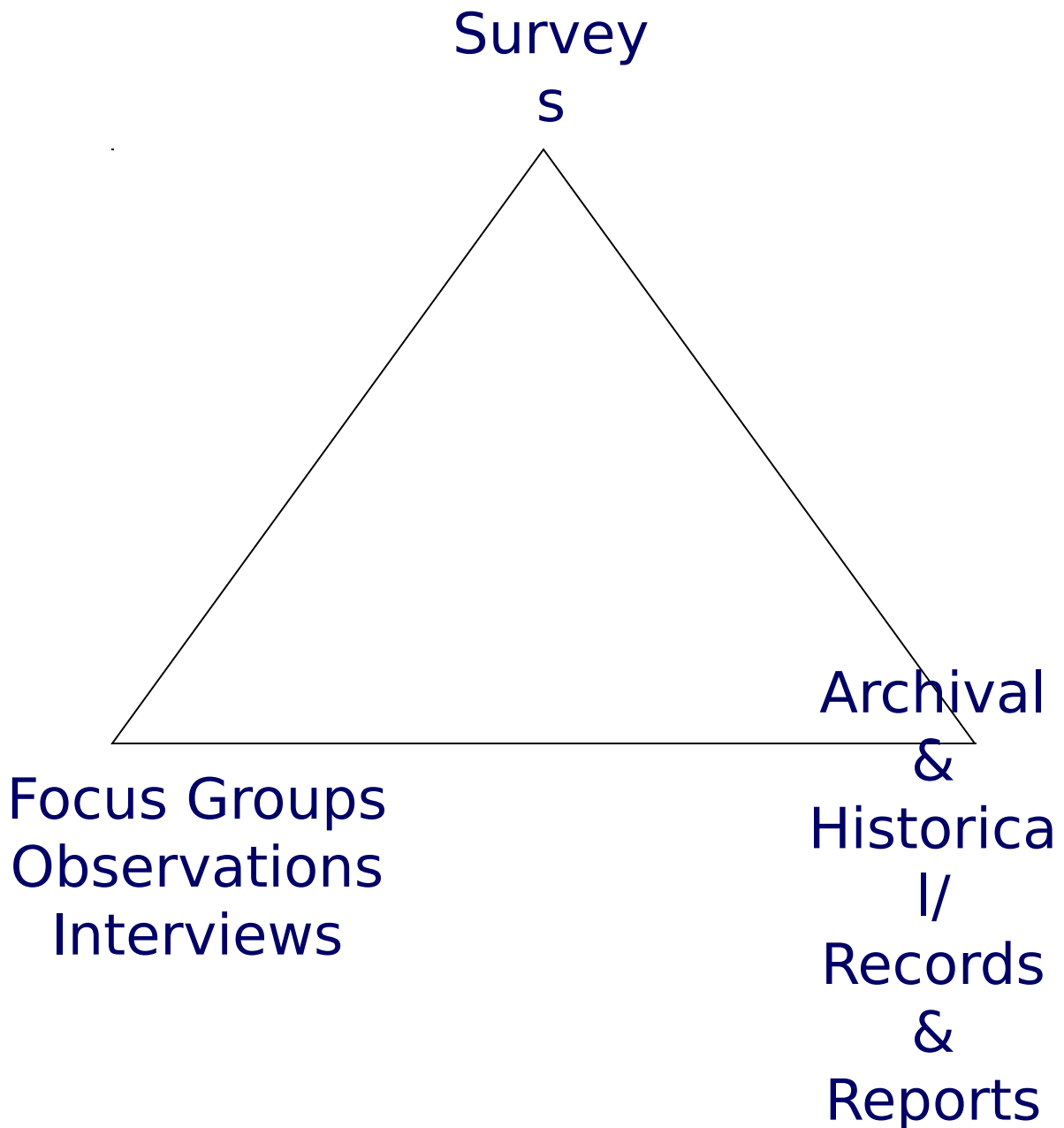
Overview and Contents

- ◆ Purpose of Focus Groups
- ◆ Advantages and Disadvantages of Focus Groups
- ◆ Planning Your Focus Group
- ◆ Facilitator Skills
- ◆ Selecting Participants
- ◆ Conducting Focus Group Interviews
- ◆ Data Analysis
- ◆ Reporting Results

Purpose of Focus Groups

- ◆ Explore “unknown” research questions
- ◆ Examine “rich” data
- ◆ Focus groups are not psychotherapy sessions

Triangulation



Quantitative and Qualitative Data

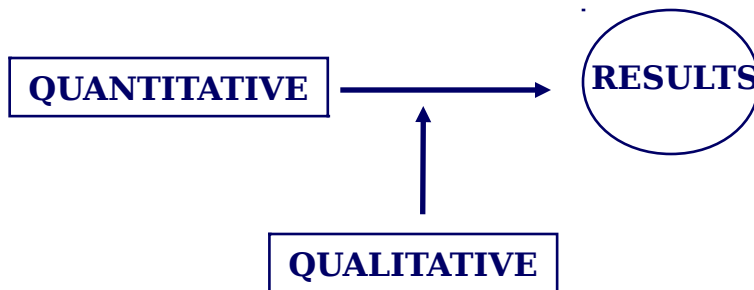
Model 1

Qualitative methods are used to help develop quantitative measures and instruments.



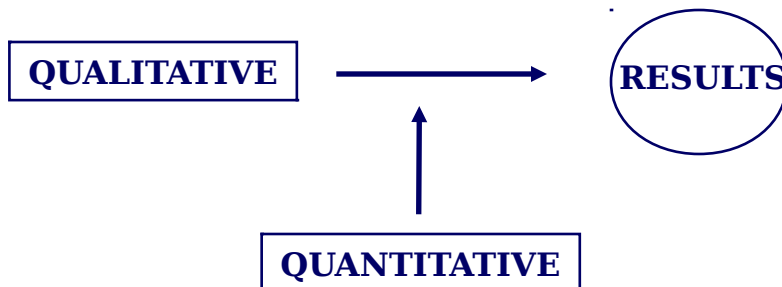
Model 2

Qualitative methods are used to help explain quantitative findings.



Model 3

Quantitative methods are used to embellish a primarily qualitative study.



Model 4

Qualitative and quantitative methods are used equally and parallel.



Qualitative Data

[Most naturalistic or qualitative researchers] conclude that triangulation is very much worth doing, because it makes data and findings credible... triangulation conclusions are more stable than any individual vantage point from which they were triangulated.

-- Guba & Lincoln

Effective Evaluation (1992)

Advantages of Focus Groups

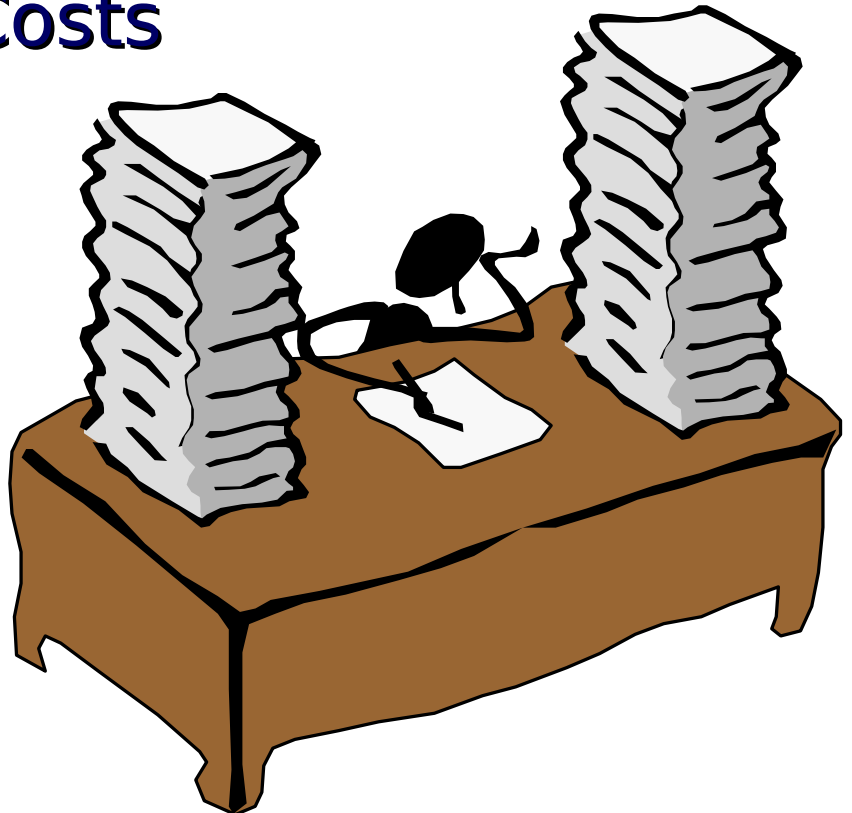
- ◆ Allows participants to express ideas spontaneously
- ◆ Short period of time
- ◆ Allows command assessment team to gather, organize, and validate information
- ◆ Data is understood by decision makers
- ◆ **M+A+S = UNDERSTANDING**

Disadvantages of Focus Groups

- ◆ “Some of the people, some of the time”
- ◆ Subjective bias: ‘halo’, ‘horns’, ‘middle-of-the road’
- ◆ Trusting the data
- ◆ Least preferred scientific method
- ◆ Potentially labor intensive and time consuming
- ◆ Potential for unfavorable reactions of respondents
 - socially desirable
 - passively aggressive
 - silent

Planning Your Focus Group

- ◆ First Steps
- ◆ Logistics/Planning
- ◆ Recruiting
- ◆ Moderating
- ◆ Analysis
- ◆ Other Costs



Commander's Contract

- ◆ Initiating directive
- ◆ Command support
- ◆ Commander's pre-brief
 - 5 Ws
 - Command Assessment
 - Commander's expectations
 - Commander's concerns (FAQ's)
- ◆ End state
 - Commander's intent
 - final report and recommendations

The Facilitator

- ◆ **“Facilitators Wear Many Hats”**
- ◆ **The Facilitator is One and the Same:**
 - The team trainer and leader
 - The research instrument
 - Data collector / organizer
 - Data analyst / interpreter
 - Report writer / briefer

The Facilitator

- ◆ **Facilitator**
 - Skillful in group discussion
 - Uses pre-determined questions
 - Established permissive environment
- ◆ **Analysis & Reporting**
 - Systematic analysis
 - Verifiable procedures
 - Appropriate reporting

Facilitator Skills

- ◆ Select the right facilitator
- ◆ Be mentally prepared
- ◆ Use purposeful small talk
- ◆ Make smooth & energetic introduction



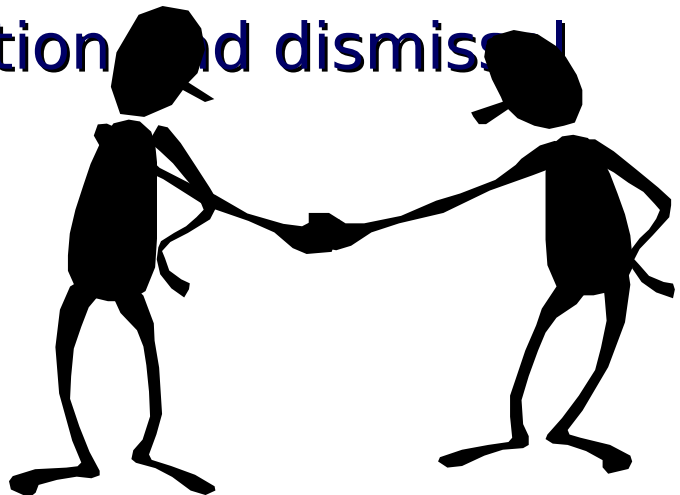
Facilitator Skills

- ◆ Use pauses and probes
- ◆ Record the discussion
 - If possible, audiotape recording
 - Assistant facilitator and note takers should be taking notes
- ◆ Exercise neutrality/objectivity
- ◆ Control reactions to the participants
 - Verbal
 - Non-verbal



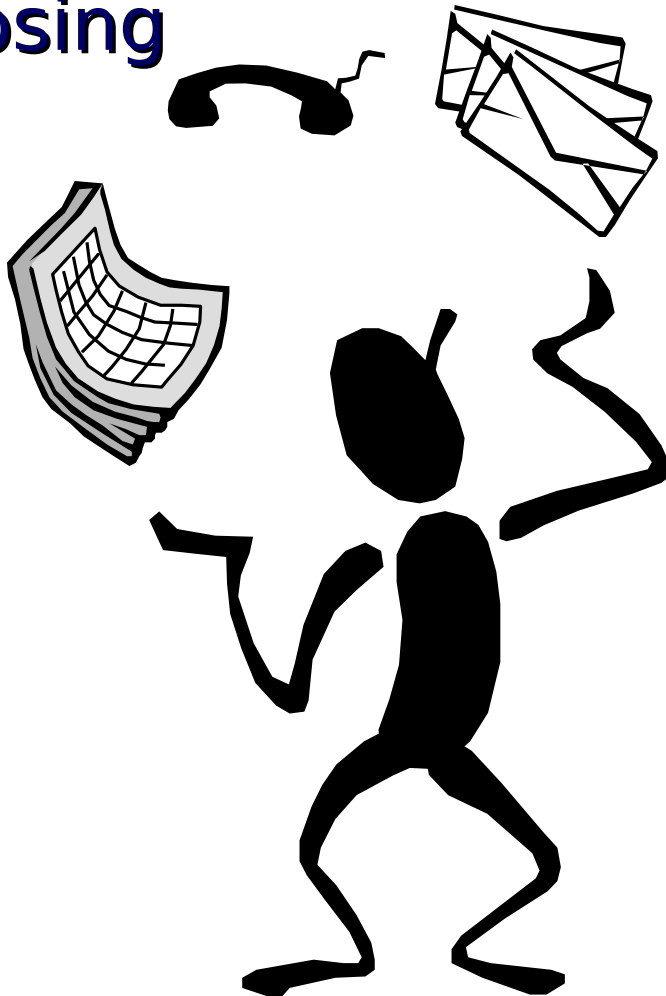
Facilitator Skills

- ◆ Use subtle group control
 - Introduction
 - Set ground rules at outset
 - Dealing with shy & dominant talkers
 - Using namecards
- ◆ Use appropriate conclusion
 - Summarize with confirmation
 - Review purpose and see if anything has been missed
 - Appreciation and dismissal



Role of the Assistant Facilitator

- ◆ Arranging the environment
- ◆ Role in focus group discussion
- ◆ Closing



Role of the Assistant Facilitator

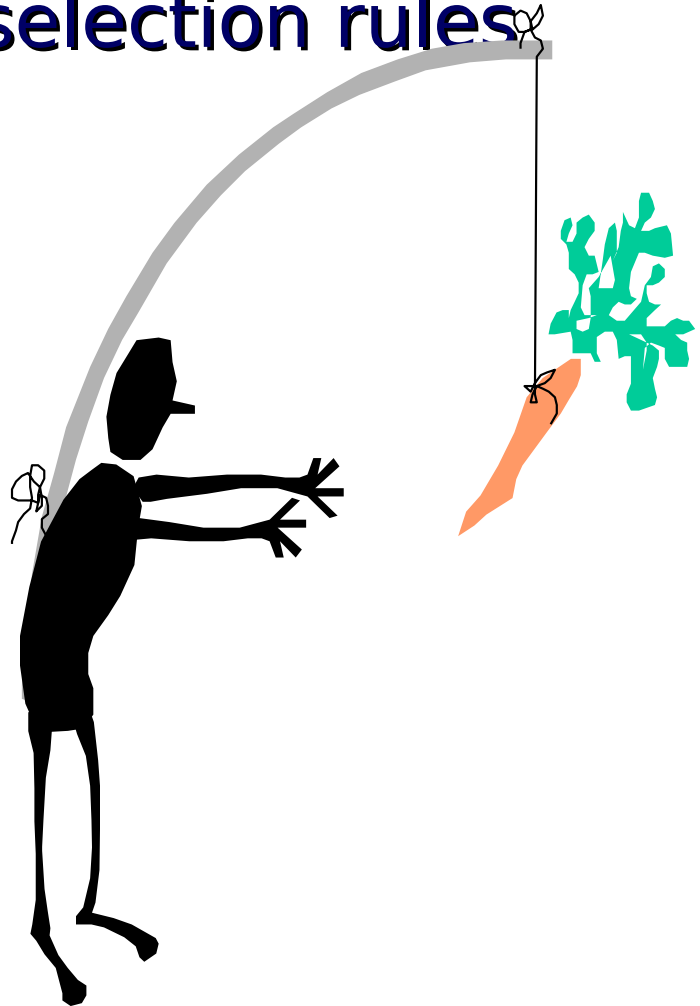
- ◆ **Working as a Co-facilitator**
 - Decide whether to co-facilitate
 - Determine the style and approach of both facilitators
- ◆ **Development and support**
- ◆ **Identification with participants**
- ◆ **Evaluate the cofacilitation process**
 - Cofacilitators and note takers
 - “Go--No Go” decision to continue cofacilitation

Characteristics of Focus Groups

- ◆ **Participants**
 - Carefully selected
 - 5-10 people/group
 - Similar types of people
 - Repeated groups
- ◆ **Environment**
 - Comfortable
 - Circle or “U” seating
 - If possible, tape record the session
 - 2-hours/session (approximately)

Conducting Focus Group Interviews - Selecting Participants

- ◆ Systematic notification procedure
 - rank, race, gender
- ◆ Incentives for participation
- ◆ General selection rules



Prime Focus Group Candidate

**“Will do focus groups
for FOOD!”**

“Will do focus groups for cash

**“Will do focus groups to learn
more about the command**

“Will do focus groups
because I’ve been here the longest
and have something to say.

**“Will do focus groups because
my command
wants my input”**



Selecting Participants

- ◆ Selection strategies
 - List potential participants
 - “Piggyback” onto a conference or meeting
 - On location at a luncheon
 - Nominations
 - “Snowball” sampling
 - Random sampling within strata

Conducting Focus Group Interviews - Asking Questions

- ◆ Use “U.F.O.” questions
- ◆ Avoid dichotomous questions
- ◆ “*Why?*” is rarely asked
- ◆ Use “*think back*” questions
- ◆ Use different types of questions
- ◆ Use questions that involve participants
- ◆ Be cautious of serendipitous questions
- ◆ Use follow-up questions: “Tell me more....”

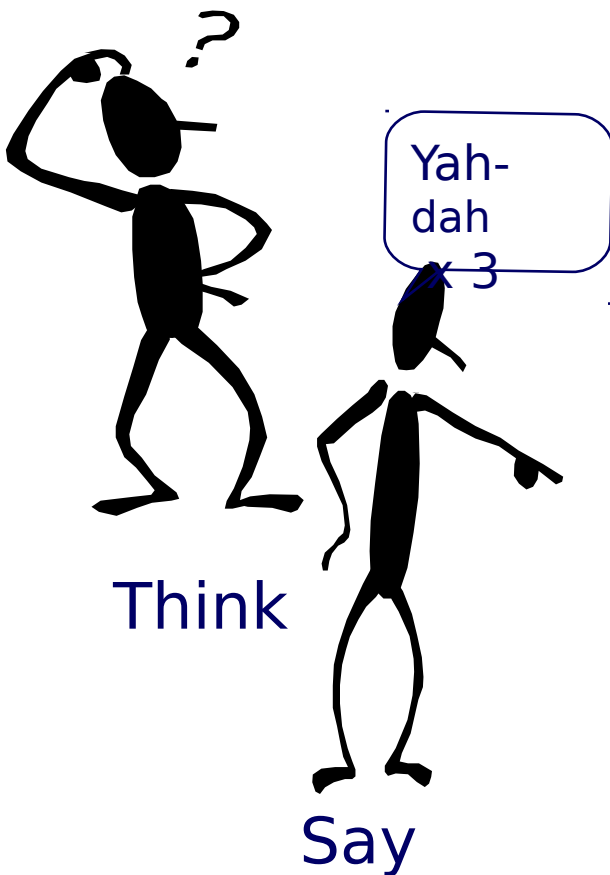
Conducting Focus Group Interviews - Key Questions

- ◆ Choose among alternatives
- ◆ Make a list
- ◆ Fill in the blank
- ◆ Rate with blank card
- ◆ Semantic differential
- ◆ Questions that foster ownership - *What can you do...?"*

Less Traditional “Key Question” Strategies

Fantasy &
Daydreams: What
do people

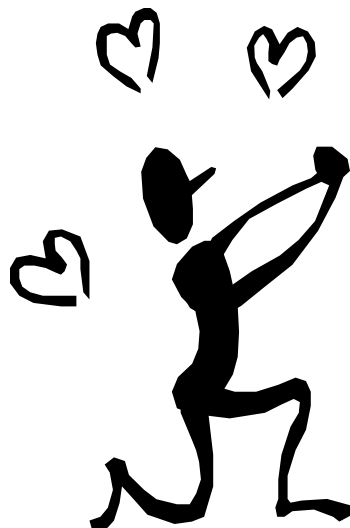
- ◆ Fantasy and daydreams
- ◆ Projection
- ◆ Draw a picture



Think

Say

and



Feel about an issue?

Conducting Focus Group Interviews - Ending Questions

- ◆ All things considered
- ◆ Oral summary
- ◆ Summary question
- ◆ Final question



Conducting Focus Group Interviews - Note Taking

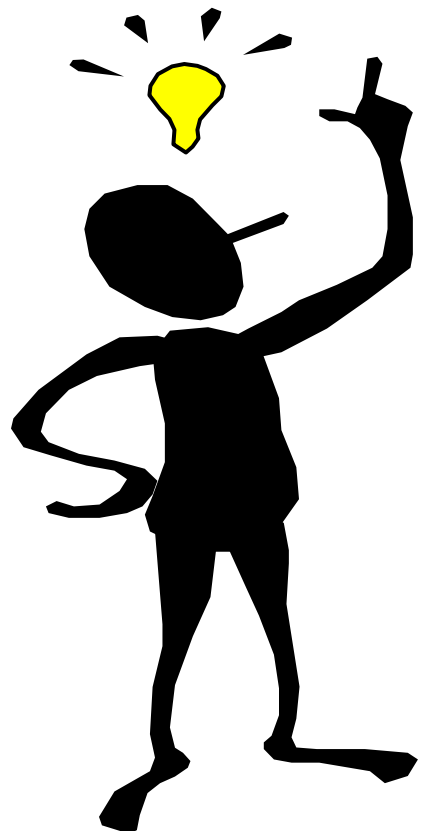
- ◆ **Note taking is a primary responsibility of the assistant facilitator and note takers**
- ◆ **Clarity and consistency of note taking**
- ◆ **Field notes contain different types of information**
- ◆ **Consider using a standardized recording form**

Data Analysis - Systematic Analysis Process

- ◆ **Start while still in the focus group**
- ◆ **Immediately after the focus group ...**
- ◆ **Soon after the focus - within hours, analyze individual focus groups**
- ◆ **Later - within days, analyze the series of focus groups**
- ◆ **Prepare the final report**

Data Analysis - Tips to Remember

- ◆ Words
- ◆ Context
- ◆ Internal Consistency
- ◆ Frequency or Extensiveness
- ◆ Intensity



Data Analysis - Tips to Remember

- ◆ Specificity
- ◆ Finding **BIG IDEAS**



Writing the Report

- ◆ Background and objectives
- ◆ Methodology
- ◆ Summary and Considerations
- ◆ Highlights of Findings
- ◆ Recommendations

Data Analysis - Transcribing Focus Group Notes

- ◆ **Minimize distractions**
- ◆ **Identify facilitator statements**
- ◆ **Type comments word-for-word**
- ◆ **Allow sufficient time**
- ◆ **If tape-recording sessions:**
 - **Use quality play-back equipment**
 - **Note special or unusual sounds that could help analysis**

Reporting Results

- ◆ Use a communications strategy
- ◆ Use an appropriate reporting style that the client finds helpful and meets expectations
- ◆ Strive for enlightenment
- ◆ Make points memorable
- ◆ Use narrative and/or bulleted format
- ◆ Give thought to the oral report



Summary

- ◆ Solicit support from command leadership
- ◆ Carefully organize every step of the focus group plan
- ◆ Clearly define roles and responsibilities of team members
- ◆ Accurately listen and record participant comments
- ◆ Analyze data and write final report
- ◆ Consider a briefing strategy to command leadership and membership

Conclusions

- ◆ Relax and learn from your participants
- ◆ Maintain an open-minded perspective
- ◆ Work as a team with your assistant facilitators and note takers
- ◆ Remember there are no documented assassinations of facilitators during focus group sessions
- ◆ HAVE FUN!!!

Appendices

- ◆ **Commandant of the Marine Corps memo**
- ◆ **Excerpt from Command assessment using focus groups**
- ◆ **Sample Focus Group Planning Checklists**
- ◆ **Sample Note taking/Recording Sheet**
- ◆ **Sample seating arrangements**

Excerpts from Command Assessment

Background

Focus group participants were motivated and willing to share information with the Command Assessment Team. Individual interviews were also conducted with those who requested confidential interviews....

Focus group topics were determined by the results of the Command managed Equal Opportunity Survey conducted in March and April 1999. Focus group participants were asked questions regarding the topics of sexual harassment, favoritism, assignments personnel evaluation, fraternization, and other related topics. Follow-up focus groups were conducted during June and July 1999. The content analyze of focus group data was accomplished August 1999.... The CAT and focus group recorders were given a briefing on focus group fundamental and procedures by CAT facilitators. Personnel were divided into the following focus groups: all female, all male (both military and civilian), all African America, all white, all enlisted (E4-E6, CPOs), all officer, payband NF-4 and GS 5-8....

Rationale/Justification

The advantage of quantitative methods (i.e., surveys) are that they produce factual, reliable outcome data that are usually generalizable to the large population. The strengths of qualitative data are they they generate rich, detailed, valid process data that usually leave the participants perspective intact. Quantitative survey results have little value on their own, however, used together with qualitative data, the results are enhanced an assisted the CAT and the command in understanding the current climate and how to improve the climate can be improved in an orderly , effective manner....

Sexual Harassment

Most females considered sexual harassment a serious problem... Questions remain regarding the definition and interpretation of sexual harassment, sexism, and who the point of contact is regarding sexual harassment complaints.... The reason is attributed to a lack of training. The data reveals that most personnel have not received sexual harassment awareness training in the past 12 months and there is blurring of lines of leadership. Most participants agreed they would not know how to effectively handle a case involving military an civilian personnel....

Excerpts from Command Assessment

Fraternization

Civilian participants reported that there is no fraternization policy for civilian. Civilian report that fraternization is not a problem in the work spaces.... Several military members explained that if there is a problem with fraternization the it is a leadership concern that should be resolves through training . Several group reported that fraternization ins not necessarily a gender issue....

Favoritism

Awards. When asked about awards, most military members agreed that they receive more recognition than their civilian counterparts. Enlisted believed they were an afterthought when it comes to awards; some believed that it's the "norm" for officers to receive more awards than enlisted....

Military managers are not knowledgeable of civilian award guidelines and procedures. Most believe that their civilian subordinates deserve awards, but they are not aware of guidelines to make the recommendations....

Training

Training requests and management are perceived as different for civilian and military personnel. Each is not fully aware of how each system operates; this leads to confusion and negative rumors....

Recommendations:

Conduct annual sexual harassment and fraternization training throughout the command. Require members to attend mandatory training and orientation....

Institute a standardized awards system, including guidelines for military and civilians. All personnel should be trained in the proposed system....

Leadership needs to continue to actively listen to personnel concerns; do not wait for crisis or command assessments before conducting a survey or focus groups; do not assume tat quiet phase is a sign of employee satisfaction, it may be symptomatic of employee rust out or burn out....

Sample Focus Group Planning Checklist A

- Identify the focus group project team and assign roles and responsibilities.
- Select focus group participants.
- Identify and reserve focus group locations.
- Draft participant invitation, including date, time and place.
- Distribute a copy of the invitation and cover letter reviewing the project purpose and logistics to managers.
- Distribute participant invitations.
- Develop a focus group schedule, agenda and discussion guide.
- Gather/reserve necessary material for focus groups.
- Facilitator, assistant facilitators, and note takers/recorders review agenda and discussion guide.
- Recorder prepares effective transcription method and arranges for necessary tools/materials.
- Conduct focus groups.
- Facilitator, assistant facilitators and note takers review notes following each focus group session.
- Assessment Team performs content analysis and drafts report.
- Assessment Team reviews draft report; makes necessary revisions.
- Assessment Team determines optimal method for briefing and distributing findings.
- Distribute results.
- Follow-up action items; conduct process improvement procedures.

Sample Focus Group Planning Checklist B

♦ Pre-focus Group

- Select dates, times and sites
- Schedule physical facilities
- Select facilitators and recorders
- Construct questions and review process
- Select participants
- Write let of invitation with response format
- Mail/distribute invitation letters
- Make copies of demographic sheet
- Arrange for light refreshment (if appropriate)
- Check response rate
- Obtain name tags and marking pens
- Remind facilitators and recorders

♦ Focus Group

- Arrange room
- Welcome participants
- Describe purpose and format
- Conduct introductions (if necessary)
- Ask 3-5 major questions
- Summarize
- Complete demographic survey
- Thank participants and provide rewards

♦ Post Focus Group

- Compile and analyze data
- Write summaries
- Combine group summaries (when appropriate)
- Prepare comprehensive report
- Distribute report

Reference: The 1997 Annual: Volume 2, Consulting/copyright 1997 by *Pfeiffer*

Sample Note taking Recording Sheet

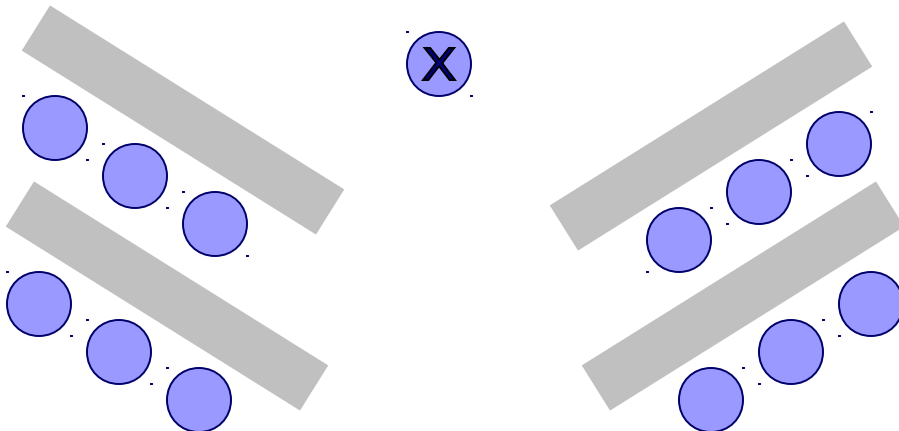
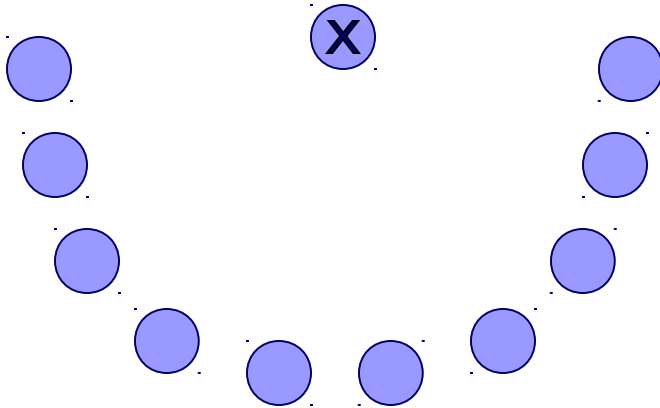
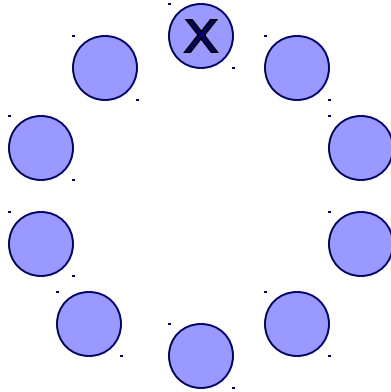
Focus Group Question Guide

Questions

1. What are your impressions of the EO program at your command?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the award management system?
- 3.

Notes/comments/etc.

Sample seating arrangements



Glossary

- ♦ *Accessibility bias:* One type of selection bias during sampling where some respondents in the population are over- or underrepresented because they are more accessible or are less accessible than others.
- ♦ *Appropriate reporting:* Final report to command leadership and command members.
- ♦ *Archival data:* Documented information (records, files, etc.) typically 3 or more years old used to determine the history of the (EO) climate of the command.
- ♦ *Focus group:* A special type of group interview that is structured to gather detailed opinions and knowledge about a particular topic from selected participants.
- ♦ *Qualitative data:* Verbal data
- ♦ *Quantitative data:* Numerical data
- ♦ *Semantic differential:* A technique that lists pairs of bipolar opposite adjectives and instructs respondents to rate the topic on each. This technique is used to measure perceptions and provide a profile.
- ♦ *Systematic analysis:* Conducting a standard data collection and analysis procedure that is effective and efficient.
- ♦ *Triangulation:* The procedure of collecting survey, focus group and archival data and noting common trends, themes and elements that defines the organizational context and current status.

Glossary (con't)

- ♦ *Verifiable procedures:* Focus group procedures that can be traced and verified by others. In addition, the process of checking with participants after they have been interviewed to be sure the person was actually interviewed and that the interview was done correctly and completely when where it was supposed to be, and commonly incorrectly call *validation*.

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